

Front Edit Other
Page Page Page

Date:

AMERICA'S REAL GAP

'If I Were President...

Whatever the gap may be between the American and Russian missile capability and potential, we are growing every day a more dangerous gap between the American political system, as it should work, and that system as it does work in these presidential election years.

We refer to the continuation of the public Washington brawl over defense posture, a brawl fed by presidential aspirations and parochial military approaches. It goes on every fourth year to edify the Russians and produce nothing for the defense or welfare of this nation.

As we noted yesterday, the current three-ring circus has been highlighted by a U.S. senator, broadbrushing in his hand secret CIA estimates, which he threatens to reveal to everybody, inevitably including the Kremlin.

The public has a right to know," says Senator Symington. Has it? Not the American public a priori should expect that their very existence should not be imperilled by preening intelligence estimates on a matter to Russian intelligence bosses who have no right to know at all.

Should defense become a quadrennial plaything of the politicians? Is there something wrong with a system that permits this to happen every presidential year? It happened four years ago. It is with us again.

Intelligence operations are conducted by all nations along several lines and towards a single goal: National security. The efforts are to find out what the other fellow has in mind and to keep him from finding out either what you have or what you have been able to learn about what he has and what he intends to do with it. The essence of the business is that you tell a potential enemy

nothing, unless it be a lie to deceive him.

Is Senator Symington's broadbrushing of the fact that the American people have been lied to, well? That is what it comes down to: Is the budget being balanced at the risk of the existence of our people? Is the President being deceitful? Or is the President wrong in his assessment of our national security position?

Let us go far in the past, from Missouri and assume that he believes no more than that the assessment of the President may be wrong. Is the senator in a better position to know the facts? Or does he believe that his position as a presidential hopeful authorizes him to play the political game as he sees fit? Again, is our system wrong, if he is led to believe that?

The senator supports his view with testimony from some eminent military men:

The Strategic Air Command chief, Gen. Power, says we have no adequate defense against Russian missile attack unless, by doubling our budget, we add to SAC's striking power and keep its planes aloft continuously in airborne alert. That's his remedy, and another airman, Gen. Twining, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, does not agree.

Former Army chief of staff, Gen. Maxwell Taylor, believes we are too deterrent-determined and think only of the big war and not the brushfire flareups. He wants more money for the Army.

The Navy's chief, Adm. Burke, asks for nearly a billion dollars more to build six extra Polaris submarines to pump nuclear weapons into Russia.

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one question: that each of the gentlemen has the national interest at heart, but obviously each has a different one in his head. Each believes the nation must be preserved not so much by an overall defense as by the services with which he is identified. That's as natural as anything should follow night; each has been raised on, and is full of confidence in, the primary essentiality of his own service.

And is Power, Taylor and Burke speak their pieces. Symington and another presidential hopeful, Senator Lyndon Johnson, publicly back each of them. In accumulation, that means the two senators want the budget doubled for increased SAC striking power; they want the extra Navy billion to speed the Polaris program; they want the Army expanded; they also want the space exploration program speeded, and missile production put on a crash basis.

Thus the senators strike a defense posture; they do not carry on to strike a balance. They call for all the spending, but are silent on replenishing the till. Neither says: "Elect me President and I'll more than double your taxes. I'll lower the national living standard, and I'll make you militarily safe."

That would be good honest talk, but not the sort of stuff of which presidential election victories are made. We haven't heard it—and we won't.